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THE

# CHOËPHOROE

(LIBATION-BEARERS)

OF

# AESCHYLUS

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
BY

GILBERT MURRAY

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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A. E. M.

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# PREFACE

THE *Choëphoroe*, or *Libation-Bearers*, is the second play in the only trilogy preserved to us from the Athenian stage : *Agamemnon, Choëphoroe, Eumenides.* The first gives the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aigisthos ; the second the vengeance of Orestes, helped by his sister Electra ; the third deals with the ultimate solution of the problem of Sin and Punishment, the purification of Orestes from the murder of his mother and the conversion of the spirits of Punishment from Furies to Beneficent Beings, from "Erinyes" to "Eumenides."

The vengeance of Orestes was made the subject of plays by all three tragedians. All the plays are in their ways masterpieces, and each highly characteristic of its writer. Euripides realizes and psychologizes the horror of the story ; Sophocles, apparently from a deliberate adoption of the "Homeric" tone, suppresses the religious problem and concentrates on the elements of direct passion. Aeschylus, as I have said elsewhere, "though steeped in the glory of the world of legend, would not lightly accept its judgment upon religious and moral questions, and above all would not, in that region, play at

make-believe. He would not elude the horror of this story by simply not mentioning it, like Homer, or by pretending that an evil act was a good one, like Sophocles. He faces the horror; realizes it; and tries to surmount it on the sweep of a great wave of religious emotion. The mother-murder, even if done by a god's command, is a sin; a sin to be expiated by unfathomable suffering. Yet, since the god cannot have commanded evil, it is a duty also. It is a sin that must be committed." The crucial difference is that the Choëphoroe is not self-contained, while the other plays are. They are concerned with a particular story; it is part of a trilogy dealing with the great problem which lies at the centre of Greek religion—Hubris, Dike, Soteria or Crime, Punishment and Deliverance. (I may refer the reader to my introductions to the Agamemnon and to Euripides' Electra.)

Thus, though to the Greek student this is perhaps, of all extant tragedies, the most obscure in detail of language, to the English reader it is not hard to understand. The atmosphere indeed is very ancient: it demands imaginative effort: but the sympathy goes as we would wish it to go and the story tells itself. Only two points call for special comment.

The first is the name of the play.[1] The other two plays are called *Electra*, after the chief character: this is called *Choëphoroe*, or *Libation-Bearers*, after the Chorus. For in truth the subjects are not,

[1] I adopt this traditional Latin transliteration in preference to "Choephori." Cf. Terence's *Adelphoe*. For readers without Greek I may mention that the word has four syllables, first the syllable "Co," then "E for E."

artistically speaking, quite the same. The main interest of the other plays is to describe how the woman Electra felt and acted with regard to the murder of her mother and step-father; in this play it is to narrate how Agamemnon, the long dead, was awakened to help his children to avenge him. The ghosts in Homer could not speak till they had drunk the blood of sacrifice. Somewhat in the same way the dead Agamemnon here cannot gather his dim senses till the drink-offerings have sunk into his grave. The wine and milk and honey reach his parched lips. He stirs in his sleep, and in that one moment of hesitating consciousness there are crowded upon him all those appeals that have most power to rouse and sting. The first words spoken in prayer at his neglected tomb; the call for vengeance sent, as it were, unknowingly by the murderess; the repeated story of his old wrongs and the outrage done upon his body; above all, the voices of his desolate children crying to him for that which he himself craves. There is no visible apparition from the tomb, as there is, for instance, in the *Persae*. But as the great litany grows in intensity of longing, the dead seem to draw nearer to the living, and conviction comes to the mourners, one after another, that he who was once King of Kings is in power among them. Where in all literature, except Aeschylus, could one find this union of primitive ghostliness with high intellectual passion? One hand seems to reach out to the African or Polynesian, while the other clasps that of Milton or Goethe.

Another point which the hasty reader might overlook is the psychological treatment of Orestes. At

the end of the play, of course, he goes mad. That is in the legend. But from quite the early scenes—much of the prologue happens to be lost—the shadow of the coming darkness begins to show itself. And the occasion for it is always the same, the conflict between two horrors which are also duties : the murder of his mother on one side, and on the other disobedience to the command of God.

Here, as in most cases, the development of Greek tragedy moves almost straight from Aeschylus to Euripides, with Sophocles standing aside. The character of Orestes, in particular, contains here in germ just the ideas that are so subtly developed in Euripides. The first study is grander, tenderer, and more heroic ; the second, of course, more detailed and varied and more finely poignant. There is a typical difference between the two poets in the way in which Orestes' last scruples are overcome. In Euripides a whole scene is given up to it. Orestes is shaken by the first sight of his mother in the distance, and actually rebels against the god or devil who has commanded him to kill her, till he is overborne by the scorn and passion of Electra's more bitter nature. In Aeschylus Orestes' scruple breaks out in the midst of the Invocation and is swept away, not specially by Electra, but by the whole great swelling rhythm of that litany of revenge.

Of the other characters, Electra in Euripides bears the main weight of the tragedy on her own shoulders. In Aeschylus she is much less minutely and without doubt less cruelly studied : almost all her words are beautiful, and she keeps a kind of tenderness even in her prayers of hate. She hates her oppressors and

her father's enemies ; but the hate is based on love, and it has not eaten into her nor left her poisoned. Clytemnestra, though she appears only for two short scenes, preserves still the almost superhuman grandeur which was hers in the *Agamemnon*. Her simplest word has power to arrest the attention ; and while she is present other people seem small and their emotions ordinary. Her own emotions lie deep and complex, fold behind fold. It is shallow to dismiss her as a hypocrite, feigning grief at the death of the son whom she fears. The hypocrisy is there, but so is the sorrow ; so are all kinds of unspoken memories and hopes and depths of experience. Always the thing she says, fine as it is, leaves the impression that there is something greater that she does not care to say. Even when she calls for the axe of battle to face her son, she has room for a thought beyond the immediate fight for dear life : "To that meseemeth we are come, we two !" That touch is like Euripides, but on the whole this heroine was a figure not in Euripides' style and perhaps not within his range. He made a Clytemnestra deliberately and utterly different.

The date of Sophocles' play is unknown. But the *Choëphoroe* was produced in 458 B.C., and Euripides' *Electra* in 413. The forty-five years that separate them were years of very rapid artistic development. The *Choëphoroe* has both an archaic beauty and a stark grimness of speech which divide it from its two companions. There are fewer details, and attention is never long distracted from the central horror. At point after point of the action it is easy to show how the two later poets refined and developed the plain lines of Aeschylus, and exerted themselves to

make the story more human and more probable. The comparison tempts one to reflect how little such technical improvements really matter, and how dangerously near to nothingness, in the last resort, are the ingenuities of realism. This play produces its illusion quite sufficiently by its mere grandeur and intensity. Yet, judged on its own archaic level, it shows remarkable skill in construction, just as, amid its story of relentless revenge, it conveys a great sense of compassion. The prologue itself is very skilful. With the last lines of the *Agamemnon* still ringing in our minds we see, as the play opens, a young man standing with shorn hair beside a grave mound ; and half the story is told in a flash. Nor, apart from the marvellous invocation scene itself, would it be easy to find in Greek drama another play with such varied moments as the prayer of Electra, the entry of the poor, loving, half-ridiculous Nurse, the sudden onrush of the single terrified slave calling for help to the Women's House ; above all, the amazing scene at the end with the blood-stained robe, the gathering of the unseen Furies, the last struggle of Orestes' reason, and the flight of the would-be Saviour as one Accursed, never to rest again. The final words of the Chorus ask the question which is to be answered, or at least attempted, in the *Eumenides*.

G. M.

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*

CLYTEMNESTRA, *formerly wife to Agamemnon, now wedded to Aigisthos.*

AIGISTHOS, *son of Thyestês, blood-foe to Agamemnon, and now Tyrant of Argos.*

PYLADES, *son of Strophios, King of Phôkis, friend to Orestes.*

The OLD NURSE *of Orestes.*

A SLAVE *of Aigisthos.*

CHORUS *of Bondmaids in the House of Clytemnestra and Aigisthos.*

## CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THE PLAY

AGAMEMNON, *son of Atreus, King of Argos, Overlord of all Hellas and Chief of the Greek Armies; murdered by Clytemnestra and Aigisthos.*

MENELAUS, *brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen.*

ZEUS, *Father of Gods and Men: Latin* Jupiter.

APOLLO *or* LOXIAS, *son of Zeus, the prophetic God of Delphi.*

HERMÊS, *Herald of the Gods, Guide of the Souls of the Dead, also patron of craft and darkness: Latin* Mercurius.

The Greeks are referred to as Hellenes, Achaians and Argives; Troy is also called Îlion.

"*The play was first produced in the archonship of Philoclês* (458 B.C.). *The First Prize was won by Aeschylus with the* Agamemnon, Choëphoroe, Eumenides *and the Satyr-play* Prôteus."

# THE CHOËPHOROE

*The scene represents the Grave of Agamemnon, a mound of earth in a desolate expanse. The time is afternoon.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *in the garb of travellers, with swords at their sides, are discovered.* ORESTES' *hair is cut short, that of* PYLADES *streams down his back. Both look grim and travel-stained.* ORESTES *holds a long tress of hair in his hand.*

ORESTES.

O Warder Hermês of the world beneath,
Son of the Father who is Lord of Death;
Saviour, be thou my saviour; Help in War,
Help me! I am returned from lands afar
To claim mine own. And on this headland steep
Of death, I call my Father o'er the deep
To hearken, to give ear.—Behold, I bring
Out of my poverty one little thing,
To adorn thy grave, though who can touch the dead
Or wake from sleep that unuplifted head?
Yet long ago in Phokis, where I lay
With Strophius in the hills, being cast away
In childhood, plundered by mine enemies,
And friendless, save for this man, Pylades,

I sware an oath which should for ever set
In memory those they taught me to forget :
If once I came to manhood, so I sware,
In tresses twain I would divide mine hair,
One tress for Inachos river, by whose grace
I live, and one for mourning at this place.
Which oath I here fulfil.

[*He lays the tress of hair upon the upper part of the grave mound.*

O Herald, lay
Before his sight the gift I bring this day,
Who stood not by to mourn him as he fell,
Nor reached mine arms to bid the dead farewell.

[*As he turns, he sees the Libation-Bearers approaching.*

Ha !
What sight is this ? What stricken multitude
Of women here in raiment sable-hued
Far-gleameth ? How shall I interpret it ?
Hath some new death upon my lineage lit ?
Or is it to my father's grave they go
With offerings, to appease the wrath below ?
It must be. Surely 'tis Electra there,
My sister, moves alone, none like to her
In sorrow. Zeus, Oh, grant to me this day
My vengeance, and be near me in the fray !
Come, Pylades, stand further, till we know
More sure, what means this embassy of woe.

[ORESTES *and* PYLADES *withdraw, as* ELECTRA *with the* CHORUS *of women bearing offerings for the Grave enters from the other side.*

CHORUS.

Driven, yea, driven [*Strophe* 1
I come: I bear Peace-offering to the dead,
Mine hands as blades that tear, my tresses riven,
And cheek ploughed red.
But all my years, before this day as after,
Have been fed full with weeping as with bread.
And this dumb cry of linen, as in pain,
Deep rent about my bosom, speaketh plain
Of a life long since wounded, where no laughter
Sounds nor shall sound again.

Dread, very dread, [*Antistrophe* 1
And hair upstarting and the wrath that streams
From the heart of sleep, have first interpreted
What manner of dreams
This house hath dreamed; a voice of terror, blasting
The midnight, up from the inmost place it grew,
Shaking the women's chambers; and the Seer,
Being sworn of God, made answer, there is here
Anger of dead men wronged, and hate outlasting
Death, against them that slew.

Craving to fly that curse [*Strophe* 2
With graceless gift hither she urgeth me
—O Earth, Mother and Nurse!—
She whom God hateth. But my spirit fears
To speak the word it bears.
When blood is spilt, how shall a gift set free?
O hearthstone wet with tears!
O pillars of a house broken in twain!
Without sun, without love,
Murk in the heart thereof and mist above,
For a lord slain!

[*Antistrophe* 2

The reverence of old years
Is gone, which not by battle nor by strife,
Stealing through charmèd ears,
Lifted the people's hearts to love their King;
Gone, yet the land still fears.
For Fortune is a god and rules men's life.
Who knows the great Wheel's swing,
How one is smitten swift in the eyes of light;
For one affliction cries
Slow from the border of sunset; and one lies
In deedless night?

[*Strophe* 3

Has Earth once drunk withal
The blood of her child, Man, the avenging stain
Hardens, nor flows again.
A blind pain draweth the slayer, draweth him,
On, on, till he is filled even to the brim
With sickness of the soul to atone for all.

[*Antistrophe* 3

The shrine of maidenhood
Once broken ne'er may be unbroke again.
And where man's life hath flowed,
All the world's rivers in their multitude
Rolling shall strive in vain
To clean from a brother's hand that ancient blood.

For me, God in far days
Laid hand upon my city, and herded me
From my old home to the House of Slavery,
Where all is violence, and I needs must praise,
Just or unjust,

The pleasure of them that rule, and speechless hold
The ache of a heart that rageth in the dust.
Only behind the fold
Of this still veil for a little I hide my face
And weep for the blind doings of this race,
And secret tears are in my heart, ice-cold.

ELECTRA.

Ye thrallèd women, tirers of the bower,
Since ye are with me in this suppliant hour,
Your escort giving, give your counsel too.
What speech have I for utterance, when I sue
With offerings to the dead? What word of love,
What prayer to reach my father from above?
"To dear Lord," shall I say, "due gifts I bear
From loving mistress" . . . when they come from her?
I dare not. And I cannot find the word
To speak, when offerings like these are poured. . . .
Or shall I pray him, as men's custom is,
To send to them who pay these offices
Requital due . . . for murder and for pride?
Or, as in silence and in shame he died,
In shame and silence shall I pour this urn
Of offering to the dust, and pouring turn,
As men cast out some foulness they abhor,
And fling the cup, and fly, and look no more?
Share with me, Friends, this burden of strange thought.
One hate doth make us one. Oh, hide not aught
For fear of what may fall us! Destiny
Waiteth alike for them that men call free,
And them by others mastered. At thine ease
Speak, if thou knowest of wiser words than these.

LEADER.

As at God's altar, since so fain thou art,
Before this Tomb I will unveil my heart.

ELECTRA.

Speak, by his grave and in the fear thereof.

LEADER.

Pray as thou pourest: To all hearts of love . . .

ELECTRA.

And who is such of all around us, who?

LEADER.

Thyself, and whoso hates Aigisthos true.

ELECTRA.

For thee and me alone am I to pray?

LEADER.

Ask thine own understanding. It will say.

ELECTRA.

Who else? What heart that with our sorrow grieves?

LEADER.

Forget not that—far off—Orestes lives.

ELECTRA.

Oh, bravely spoke! Thou counsellest not in vain.

LEADER.

Next; on the sinners pray, their sin made plain. . . .

ELECTRA.

Pray what? I know not. Oh, make clear my road!

LEADER.

Pray that there come to them or man or god. . . .

ELECTRA.

A judge? Or an avenger? Speak thy prayer.

LEADER.

Plain be thy word: one who shall slay the slayer.

ELECTRA.

But dare I? Is it no sin thus to pray?

LEADER.

How else? With hate thine hater to repay.

[ELECTRA *mounts upon the Grave Mound and makes sacrifice.*

ELECTRA.

Herald most high of living and of dead,
Thou midnight Hermês, hear; and call the dread
Spirits who dwell below the Earth, my vows
To hearken and to watch my father's house;
And Earth our Mother, who doth all things breed
And nurse, and takes again to her their seed.
And I too with thee, as I pour these streams
To wash dead hands, will call him in his dreams:
O Father, pity me; pity thine own
Orestes, and restore us to thy throne;
We are lost, we are sold like slaves: and in our stead
Lo, she hath brought thy murderer to her bed,

Aigisthos. I am like one chained alway ;
Orestes wandering without house or stay ;
But they are full of pride, and make turmoil
And banquet of the treasures of thy toil.
Guide thou Orestes homeward, let there be
Some chance to aid him :—Father, hark to me !
And, oh, give me a heart to understand
More than my mother, and a cleaner hand !
These prayers for us ; but for our enemies
This also I speak : O Father, let there rise
Against them thine Avenger, and again
The slayer in just recompense be slain.—
Behold, I pray great evil, and I lay
These tokens down ; yea, midmost as I pray
Against thine enemies I lay them—so.
Do thou to us send blessing from below
With Zeus, and Earth, and Right which conquereth all.
These be the prayers on which mine offerings fall.
Do ye set lamentation like a wreath
Round them, and cry the triumph-song of death.

[*She proceeds with the pouring of offerings and presently finds on the tomb the Lock of Hair. The* Chorus *makes lamentation before the grave.*

Chorus.

Let fall the tear that plashes as it dies,
Where the dead lies,
Fall on this barrèd door,
Where Good nor Evil entereth any more,
This holy, abhorrèd thing,
We turn from, praying.—Lo, the milk and wine

Are poured. Awake and hear, thou awful King;
Hear in thy darkened soul, O Master mine!

Oh, for some man of might
To aid this land, some high and visible lord
Of battle, shining bright
Against Death; the great lance
Bearing deliverance,
The back-bent Scythian bow, the hilted sword
Close-held to smite and smite!

ELECTRA (*excitedly returning from the Grave*).

Behold,
The offerings of the dust are ministered:
But counsel me. I bear another word.

LEADER.

Speak on. My spirit leaps for eagerness.

ELECTRA.

Cast on the tomb I found this shaven tress.

LEADER.

Who cast it there? What man or zonèd maid?

ELECTRA.

Methinks that is a riddle quickly read!

LEADER.

Thy thought is swift; and may thine elder know?

ELECTRA.

What head save mine would blazon thus its woe?

LEADER.

She that should mourn him is his enemy.

ELECTRA (*musing, to herself*).

Strange bird, but of one feather to mine eye. . .

LEADER.

With what? Oh, speak. Make thy comparison.

ELECTRA.

Look; think ye not 'tis wondrous like mine own?

LEADER.

Thy brother's! . . . Sent in secret! Can it be?

ELECTRA.

'Tis like his long locks in my memory.

LEADER.

Orestes! Would he dare to walk this land?

ELECTRA.

Belike he sent it by another's hand!

LEADER.

That calls for tears no less, if never more
His footstep may be set on Argos shore.

ELECTRA.

At my heart also bitterer than gall
A great wave beats. The iron hath passed thro' all

My being ; and the stormy drops that rise
Full unforbidden from these starvèd eyes,
Gazing upon this hair. 'Tis past belief
That any Argive tree hath shed this leaf.
And sure she shore it not who wrought his death,
My mother, godless, with no mother's faith
Or kindness for her child.—And yet to swear
Outright that this glad laugher is the hair
Of my beloved Orestes. . . . Oh, I am weak
With dreaming ! Had it but a voice to speak
Like some kind messenger, I had not been
This phantom tossing in the wind between
Two fancies. Either quick it would proclaim
Its hate, if from some hater's head it came ;
Or, if it were our own, with me 'twould shed
Tears for this tomb and our great father dead. . .
Surely they know, these gods to whom we pray,
Through what wild seas our vessel beats her way,
And, if to save us is their will, may breed
A mighty oak-trunk from a little seed. . . .

[*She goes back to the Tomb, searching.*

Ah see, the print of feet, a second sign !
The same feet : surely they are shaped like mine.
Surely ! Two separate trails of feet are there :
He and perchance some fellow traveller.
The heels ; the mark of the long muscle thrown
Athwart them on the sand—just like mine own
In shape and measure. What ? . . . Oh, all is vain ;
Torment of heart and blinding of the brain !

[*She buries her face in her hands.* ORESTES *rises from his hiding-place and stands before her.*

ORESTES.

Thy prayer hath borne its fruit. Hereafter tell
The gods thy thanks, and may the end be well!

ELECTRA.

What meanest thou? What hath God done for me?

ORESTES.

Shown thee a face which thou hast longed to see.

ELECTRA.

What face? What know'st thou of my secret heart?

ORESTES.

Orestes'. For that name all fire thou art.

ELECTRA.

If that be so, how am I near mine end?

ORESTES.

Here am I, Sister. Seek no closer friend.

ELECTRA.

Stranger! It is a plot thou lay'st for me!

ORESTES.

Against mine own dear life that plot would be.

ELECTRA.

Thou mock'st me! Thou would'st laugh to hear me moan!

ORESTES.

Who mocks thy tribulation mocks mine own.

ELECTRA.

My heart half dares foretell that thou art he . . .

ORESTES.

Nay, when I face thee plain thou wilt not see!
Oh, seeing but that shorn tress of funeral hair
Thy soul took wings and seemed to hold me there;
Then peering in my steps . . . thou knew'st them mine,
Thy brother's, moulded feet and head like thine.
Set the lock here, where it was cut. Behold
This cloak I wear, thy woven work of old,
The battened ridges and the broidered braid
Of lions . . .

[ELECTRA *throws herself into his arms.*

Hold! Ah, be not all dismayed
With joy! Our nearest is our deadliest foe.

ELECTRA.

O best beloved, O dreamed of long ago,
Seed of deliverance washed with tears as rain,
By thine own valour thou shalt build again
Our father's House! O lightener of mine eyes,
Four places in my heart, four sanctities,
Are thine. My father in thy face and mien
Yet living: thine the love that might have been
My mother's—whom I hate, most righteously—
And my poor sister's, fiercely doomed to die,

And thou my faithful brother, who alone
Hast cared for me. . . . O Victory, be our own
This day, with Justice who doth hold us fast,
And Zeus most high, who saveth at the last!

ORESTES.

O Zeus, O Zeus, look down on our estate!
Hast seen thine eagle's brood left desolate,
The father in the fell toils overborne
Of some foul serpent, and the young forlorn
And starved with famine, still too weak of wing
To bear to the nest their father's harvesting?
Even so am I, O Zeus, and even so
This woman, both disfathered long ago,
Both to one exile cast, both desolate.
He was thy worshipper, thy giver great
Of sacrifice. If thou tear down his nest,
What hand like his shall glorify thy feast?
Blot out the eagle's brood, and where again
Hast thou thy messenger to speak to men?
Blast this most royal oak, what shade shall cool
Thine altars on the death-day of the Bull?
But cherish us, and from a little seed
Thou shalt make great a House now fallen indeed.

LEADER.

O Children, Saviours of your father's House,
Be silent! Children, all is perilous;
And whoso hears may idly speak of ye
To our masters; whom may I yet live to see
Dead where the pine logs ooze in fragrant fire!

ORESTES. (*He speaks with increasing horror as he proceeds.*)

Oh, Loxias shall not mock my great desire,
Who spoke his divine promise, charging me
To thread this peril to the extremity :
Yea, raised his awful voice and surging told
To my hot heart of horrors stormy-cold
Till I seek out those murderers, by the road
Themselves have shown—so spake he—blood for blood,
In gold-rejecting rage, the wild bull's way !
If not, for their offending I must pay
With mine own life, in torment manifold.
Of many things that rise from earth he told,
To appease the angry dead : yea, and strange forms,
On thee and me, of savage-fangèd worms,
Climbing the flesh ; lichens, which eat away
Even unto nothingness our natural clay.
And when they leave him, a man's hair is white.
For him that disobeys, he said, the night
Hath Furies, shapen of his father's blood ;
Clear-seen, with eyeball straining through the hood
Of darkness. The blind arrows of dead men
Who cried their kin for mercy and were slain,
And madness, and wild fear out of the night,
Shall spur him, rack him, till from all men's sight
Alone he goes, out to the desert dim,
And that bronze horror clanging after him !
For such as he there is no mixing bowl,
No dear libation that binds soul to soul :
From every altar fire the unseen rage
Outbars him : none shall give him harbourage,
Nor rest beneath one roof with such an one ;

Till, without worship, without love, alone
He crawls to his death, a carcase to the core
Through-rotted, and embalmed to suffer more.

*Collecting himself*]

So spake he . . . God, and is one to believe
Such oracles as these? Nay, though I give
No credence, the deed now must needs be done.
So many things of power work here as one:
The God's command; grief for my father slain;
And mine own beggary urgeth me amain,
That never shall these Argives, famed afar,
High conquerors of Troy in joyous war
Cower to . . . two women. For he bears, I know,
A woman's heart. . . . If not, this day will show.

[*He kneels at the Grave:* ELECTRA *kneels opposite him and the* CHORUS *gather behind.*

CHORUS.

Ye great Apportionments of God,
The road of Righteousness make straight:
"For tongue of hate be tongue of hate
Made perfect": thus, as falls her rod,
God's justice crieth: "For the blow
Of death the blow of death atone."
"On him that doeth shall be done":
Speaks a grey word of long ago.

ORESTES. [*Strophe* 1

O Father, Father of Doom,
What word, what deed from me,
Can waft afar to the silent room
Where thy sleep holdeth thee

A light that shall rend thy gloom?
Yet surely, the tale is told,
That tears are comfort beneath the tomb
To the great Kings of old.

LEADER. [*Strophe* 2

No fire ravening red,
O Son, subdueth quite
The deep life of the dead;
His wrath breaks from the night.
When they weep for one who dies
His Avenger doth arise,
Yea, for father and life-giver
There is Justice, when the cries
And the tears run as a river.

ELECTRA. [*Antistrophe* 1

O Father, hearken and save,
For my sore sorrow's sake!
Children twain are above thy grave
Seeking for thee: Oh, wake!
Thy grave is their only home,
The beggared and out-cast.
What here is well? What is saved from doom?
O Atê strong to the last!

CHORUS.

Yet still it may be—God is strong—
A changèd music shall be born
To sound above this dirge forlorn,
And the King's House with Triumph-song
Lead home a Friend in love new-sworn.

ORESTES. [*Strophe* 3

Would that in ancient days,
Father, some Lycian lance
Had slain thee by Ilion's wall;
Then hadst thou left great praise
In thy House, and thy children's glance
In the streets were marked of all:
Men had upreared for thee
A high-piled burial hill
In a land beyond the sea;
And the House could have borne its ill.

LEADER. [*Antistrophe* 2

And all they who nobly died
Would have loved him in that place,
And observed him in his pride
As he passed with royal pace
To a throne at the right hand
Of the Kings of the Dark Land:
For a king he was when living,
Above all who crownèd stand
With the sceptre of lawgiving.

ELECTRA. [*Antistrophe* 3

Nay, would thou hadst died not ever!
Not by the Ilian Gate,
Not when the others fell
Spear-broken beside the river!
If they who wrought thee hate
Had died, it had all been well:

A strange death, full of fear,
That the folk beyond far seas
Should enquire thereof, and hear;
Not of our miseries!

CHORUS.

My daughter, rare as gold is rare,
And blither than the skies behind
The raging of the northern wind
Are these thy prayers: for what is prayer?
Yet, be thou sure, this twofold scourge
Is heard: it pierceth to the verge
Of darkness, and your helpers now
Are wakening. These enchariotèd
Above us, lo, their hand is red!
Abhorrèd are they by the dead;
But none so hates as he and thou!

ORESTES. [*Strophe* 4

Ah me, that word, that word
Stabbeth my heart, as a sword!
God, God, who sendest from below
Blind vengeance in the wake
Of sin, what deed have I to do,
With hand most weak and full of woe?
'Tis for my father's sake!

LEADER. [*Strophe* 5

May it be mine, may it be mine,
To dance about the blazing pine
Crying, crying,
"A man is slain, a woman dying!"

It hideth in my bosom's core,
  It beats its wings for death, for death,
A bitter wind that blows before
  The prow, a hate that festereth,
A thing of horror, yet divine !

ELECTRA. [*Antistrophe* 4

  Zeus of the orphan, when
  Wilt lift thy hand among men ?
Let the land have a sign. Be strong,
  And smite the neck from the head.
I ask for right after much wrong.
Hear me, O God ! Hark to my song,
  Ye Princedoms of the Dead !

CHORUS.

'Tis written : the shed drop doth crave
  For new blood. Yea, the murdered cry
Of dead men shrieketh from the grave
  To Her who out of sins gone by
  Makes new sin, that the old may die.

ORESTES. [*Strophe* 6

How ? Are ye dumb, Ye Princedoms of the Dead ?
  O Curses of Them that perish, come hither, hither !
Look on this wreck of kings, the beaten head,
Bowed in despair, roofless, disherited !
  Whither to turn, O Lord Zeus ? Whither, whither ?

LEADER. [*Antistrophe* 5

  My heart, my heart is tossed again
  To see thee yielded up to pain,

Failing, failing;
Then mist is on my eyes and wailing
About mine ears, and tears as rain.
But when once more I look on thee
With power exalted, sudden-swift
A hope doth all my burden lift,
And light, and signs of things to be.

ELECTRA. [*Antistrophe* 6

What best shall pierce thine ear; the wrongs she wrought,
Wrought upon us, upon us, she and none other?
Oh, fawn and smile: but the wrongs shall soften not,
Wrongs with a wolfish heart, by a wolf begot:
They see no smile, they reck not the name of Mother!

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 7

With the dirge of Agbatana I beat my breast:
Like the Keeners of Kissia, I make songs of pain.
Lo, yearning of arms abundant, east and west:
Tearing they smite, again and yet again,
From above, from high; yea, God hath smitten red
This bitter bleeding bosom, this bended head.

ELECTRA. [*Strophe* 8

Ho, Mother! Ho, thou, Mother,
Mine enemy, daring all!
What burial made ye here?
His people followed not,
Mourned him not, knew him not:
Enemies bare his pall:
His wife shed no tear!

ORESTES. [*Strophe* 9

All, all dishonour, so thy story telleth it !
And for that dishonour shall the woman pay,
As the gods have willed it, as my right hand willeth it !
Then Death may take me, let me only slay !

LEADER. [*Antistrophe* 9

His hands and feet, they were hacked away from him !
Yea, she that buried him, she wrought it so.
To make thy life blasted, without help or stay from him.
Thou hast it all, the defiling and shame and woe !

[ORESTES *breaks down in speechless tears.*

ELECTRA. [*Antistrophe* 7

Thou tellest the doom he died, but I saw him not ;
I was far off, dishonoured and nothing worth.
Like a dog they drove me back, and the door was shut,
And alone I poured my tears to him through the earth.
I laughed not, yet rejoiced that none saw me weep.—
Write this in thine heart, O Father ; grave it deep.

LEADER. [*Antistrophe* 8

Write ! Yea, and draw the word
Deep unto that still land
Where thy soul dwells in peace.
What is, thou hast this day heard ;
What shall be, reach forth thine hand

And take it! Be hard, be hard
To smite and not cease!

(ORESTES, ELECTRA, *and the* LEADER.)

ORESTES. [*Strophe* 10

Thee, thee I call. Father, be near thine own.

ELECTRA.

I also cry thee, choked with the tears that flow.

LEADER.

Yea, all this band, it crieth to thee as one.

ALL.

O great King, hear us. Awake thee to the sun.
Be with us against thy foe!

ORESTES. [*Antistrophe* 10

The slayer shall meet the slayer, wrong smite with wrong.

ELECTRA.

O Zeus, bless thou the murder to be this day.

LEADER.

(Dost hear? Oh, fear is upon me and trembling strong.)

ALL.

The day of Fate is old, it hath lingered long;
It cometh to them that pray.

DIVERS WOMEN. [*Strophe* 11

—Alas, alas, for the travail born in the race,
—Alas for the harp of Atê, whose strings run blood,
—The beaten bosom, the grief too wild to bear.
—The pain that gnaweth, and will not sink to sleep.

*Antistrophe* 11

—The House hath healing for its own bitterness;
—It is here within. None other can stay the flood;
—Through bitter striving, through hate and old despair.
—Behold the Song of the Daemons of the deep!

ORESTES.

O Father mine, O most unkingly slain,
Grant me the lordship of thy House again.

ELECTRA.

A boon for me likewise, O Father, give;
To lay Aigisthos in his blood and live.

ORESTES.

So men shall honour thee with wassail high;
Else without meat or incense shalt thou lie,
Unhonoured when the dead their banquets call.

ELECTRA.

And I will pour thee offerings wondrous fair
From my stored riches for a marriage-prayer,
And this thy grave will honour more than all.

ORESTES.

Send back, O Earth, my sire to comfort me.

ELECTRA.

In power, in beauty, Great Persephone !

ORESTES.

Remember, Father, how they laved thee there !

ELECTRA.

Remember the strange weaving thou didst wear !

ORESTES.

A snarèd beast in chains no anvil wrought !

ELECTRA.

In coilèd webs of shame and evil thought !

ORESTES.

Scorn upon scorn ! Oh, art thou wakenèd ?

ELECTRA.

Dost rear to sunlight that belovèd head ?

ORESTES.

Or send thine helping Vengeance to the light
To aid the faithful : or let even fight
Be joined in the same grapple as of yore,
If, conquered, thou wouldst quell thy conqueror.

ELECTRA.

Yet one last cry : O Father, hear and save !
Pity thy children cast upon thy grave :
The woman pity, and the weeping man.

ORESTES.

And blot not out the old race that began
With Pelops : and though slain thou art not dead !

ELECTRA.

Children are living voices for a head
Long silent, floats which hold the net and keep
The twisted line unfoundered in the deep.

ORESTES.

Listen : 'tis thou we weep for, none but thou :
Thyself art savèd if thou save us now.

LEADER.

Behold, ye have made a long and yearning praise,
This sepulchre for unlamented days
Requiting to the full. And for the rest,
Seeing now thine heart is lifted on the crest
Of courage, get thee to the deed, and see
What power the Daemon hath which guardeth thee.

ORESTES.

So be it. Yet methinks to know one thing
Were well. Why sent she this drink-offering ?
Hoped she by late atonement to undo
That wrong eternal ? A vain comfort, too,

Sent to one dead, and feeling not! My mind
Stumbles to understand what lies behind
These gifts, so puny for the deed she hath done.
Yea, though man offer all he hath to atone
For one life's blood, 'tis written, he hath lost
That labour.—But enough. Say all thou know'st.

LEADER.

Son, I was near her, and could mark aright.
A dream, a terror wandering in the night,
Shook her dark spirit till she spoke that word.

ORESTES.

What was the dream she dreamed? Speak, if ye heard.

LEADER.

She bore to life, she said, a Serpent Thing.

ORESTES.

And after? To its head thy story bring.

LEADER.

In swathing clothes she lapt it like a child.

ORESTES.

It craved for meat, that dragon of the wild?

LEADER.

Yes; in the dream she gave it her own breast.

ORESTES.

And took no scathing from the evil beast?

LEADER.

The milk ran into blood. So deep it bit.

ORESTES.

The dream is come. The man shall follow it.

LEADER.

And she, appalled, came shrieking out of sleep ;
And many a torch, long blinded in the deep
Of darkness, in our chambers burst afire
To cheer the Queen. Then spake she her desire,
To send, as a swift medicine for the dread
That held her, these peace offerings to the dead.

ORESTES.

Behold, I pray this everlasting Earth,
I pray my father's grave, they bring to birth
In fullness all this dream. And here am I
To read its heart and message flawlessly.
Seeing that this serpent, born whence I was born,
Wore the same swathing-bands these limbs had worn,
Fanged the same breast that suckled me of yore,
And through the sweet milk drew that gout of gore ;
And seeing she understood, and sore afeared
Shrieked : therefore it must be that, having reared
A birth most ghastly, she in wrath shall die :
And I, the beast, the serpent, even I
Shall slay her ! Be it so. The dream speaks clear.

LEADER.

I take thyself for mine interpreter,
And pray that this may be. But speak thy will
Who shall be doing, say, and who be still ?

ORESTES.

'Tis simply told. This woman makes her way
Within, and ye my charges shall obey,
That they who slew by guile a man most rare,
By guile, and snarèd in the self-same snare,
May die, as Lord Apollo hath foretold,
Loxias the Seer, who never failed of old.
First, I array me in a stranger's guise,
With all the gear of travel, and likewise
This man—their guest and battle-guest of yore!
Then hither shall we come, and stand before
The courtyard gate, and call. Aye, we will teach
Our tongues an accent of Parnassian speech,
Like men in Phôkis born. And say, perchance
None of the warders with glad countenance
Will ope to us, the House being so beset
With evil: aye, what then? Then obdurate
We shall wait on, till all who pass that way
Shall make surmise against the House, and say
"What ails Aigisthos? Wherefore doth he close
His door against the traveller, if he knows
And is within?" So comes it, soon or late,
I cross the threshold of the courtyard gate;
And entering find him on my father's throne. . . .
Or, say he is abroad and comes anon,
And hears, and calls for me—and there am I
Before him, face to face and eye to eye;
"Whence comes the traveller?" ere he speaks it, dead
I lay him, huddled round this leaping blade!
Then shall the Curse have drunken of our gore
Her third, last, burning cup, and thirst no more.

Therefore go thou within, and watch withal
That all this chance may well and aptly fall.
For you, I charge ye of your lips take heed :
Good words or silence, as the hour may need.
While One Below his counsel shall afford
And ope to me the strait way of the sword.

[ORESTES *and* PYLADES *depart,* ELECTRA *goes into the House.*

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

Host on host, breedeth Earth
Things of fear and ghastly birth ;
Arm on arm spreads the Sea
That full of coilèd horrors be ;
And fires the sky doth multiply ;
And things that crawl, and things that fly,
And they that are born in the wind can tell of the perils
Of tempest and the Wrath on high.

[*Antistrophe* 1

But, ah, the surge over-bold
Of man's passion who hath told ?
Who the Love, wild as hate,
In woman's bosom desperate,
Which feedeth in the fields of Woe ?
Where lives of mortals linkèd go
The heart of a woman is perilous past all perils
Of stars above or deeps below.

[*Strophe* 2

Wist ye not, O light of mind,
Her who slew her son with hate,
Thestios' daughter desolate,

How she wrought All her thought
To one counsel, fiery-blind,
When she burned the brand of fate,
That was twin to him and brother
From the hour of that first cry
When the babe came from the mother
Till the strong man turned to die?

[*Antistrophe* 2

Wist ye not one loathed of old,
Who to win a foe did sell,
Cruel, him who loved her well;
Skylla, dyed with blood and pride,
Who craved the rings of Cretan gold
That Minos gave, too rich to tell;
Like a wolf at night she came
Where he lay with tranquil breath,
And she cut the Crest of Flame:
And, a-sudden, all was death.

[*Strophe* 3

But o'er all terrors on man's tongue
The woman's deed of Lemnos lies;
It echoes, like an evil song,
Far off, and whensoe'er there rise
New and strange sins, in dire surmise,
Men mind them of the Lemnian wrong.
Yet surely by the Sin God's eye
Abhorreth, mortal man shall die,
And all the glory that was his.
For who shall lift that thing on high
Which God abaseth? Not amiss

I garner to my crown of woe
These sins of Woman long ago.

[*Antistrophe* 3

O lust so old, so hard of heart!
I lose me in the stories told,
Untimely. Have these walls no part
In ravening of desire, as bold
And evil as those deeds of old?
The House with dread thereof doth start
From dreaming. On, through woe or weal
A woman brooding planned her path,
Against a warrior robed in steel,
And armies trembled at his wrath.
And he is gone; and we must kneel
On a cold hearth and bow in fear
Before a woman's trembling spear.

[*Strophe* 4

Lo, the sword hovereth at the throat
For Justice' sake. It scorneth not
What the proud man to earth has trod.
Its edge is bitter to the bone;
It stabbeth on, thro' iron, thro' stone,
Till it reach him who hath forgot
That Ruth which is the law of God.

[*Antistrophe* 4

For Justice is an oak that yet
Standeth; and Doom the Smith doth whet
His blade in the dark. But what is this?
A child led to the House from lands
Far off, and blood upon his hands!
The great Erinys wreaks her debt,
Whose thought is as the vast abyss.

*The scene now represents the front of the Palace of the Atridae, with one door leading to the main palace, another to the Women's House. Dusk is approaching.*

[*Enter* ORESTES *and* PYLADES, *disguised as merchants from Phôkis, with Attendants.*

ORESTES.

Ho, Warder! Hear! One knocketh at your gate! . . .
Ho, Warder, yet again! I knock and wait. . . .
A third time, ye within! I call ye forth;
Or counts your lord the stranger nothing worth?

A PORTER (*within, opening the main door*).

Enough! I hear. What stranger and wherefrom?

ORESTES.

Go, rouse your masters. 'Tis to them I come,
Bearing great news. And haste, for even now
Night's darkling chariot presseth to the brow
Of heaven, and wayfarers like us must find
Quick anchorage in some resthouse for our kind.
Let one come forth who bears authority;
A woman, if God will; but if it be
A man, 'twere seemlier. With a woman, speech
Trembles and words are blinded. Man can teach
Man all his purpose and make clear his thought.

[*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA *from the House.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Strangers, your pleasure? If ye have need of aught
All that beseems this House is yours to-day,
Warm bathing and the couch that soothes away
Toil, and the tendering of righteous eyes.
Else, if ye come on some grave enterprise,
That is man's work; and I will find the man.

ORESTES.

I come from Phôkis, of the Daulian clan,
And, travelling hither, bearing mine own load
Of merchandise, toward Argos, as the road
Branched, there was one who met me, both of us
Strangers to one another: Strophius,
A Phocian prince, men called him. On we strode
Together, till he asked me of my road
And prayed me thus: "Stranger, since other care
Takes thee to Argos, prithee find me there
The kin of one Orestes. . . . Plainly said
Is best remembered: tell them he is dead.
Forget not. And howe'er their choice may run,
To bear his ashes home, or leave their son
In a strange grave, in death an exile still,
Discover, and bring back to me their will.
Tell them his ashes lie with me, inurned
In a great jar of bronze, and richly mourned."
So much I tell you straight, being all I heard.
Howbeit, I know not if I speak my word
To the right hearers, princes of this old
Castle. Methinks his father should be told.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me,
So cometh the last wreck in spite of all !
Curse of this House, thou foe that fear'st no fall,
How dost thou spy my hidden things and mar
Their peace with keen-eyed arrows from afar,
Till all who might have loved me, all, are gone !
And now Orestes ; whom I had thought upon
So wisely, walking in free ways, his gait
Unsnarèd in this poison-marsh of hate !
The one last hope, the healing and the prayer
Of this old House, 'twas writ on empty air !

ORESTES.

For me, in a great House and favoured thus
By fortune, 'tis by tidings prosperous
I fain were known and welcomed. Pleasantest
Of all ties is the tie of host and guest.
But my heart told me 'twere a faithless thing
To fail a comrade in accomplishing
His charge, when I had pledged both word and hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not for our sorrow shall thy portion stand
The lowlier, nor thyself be less our friend.
Another would have told us ; and the end
Is all one. But 'tis time that strangers who
Have spent long hours in travel should have due
Refreshment. Ho, there ! Lead him to our broad
Guest-chambers, and these comrades of his road
Who follow. See they find all comfort there

To assuage their way-worn bodies. And have care
That in their tendance naught be found amiss.
Ourselves shall with our Lord consult of this
Distress, and, having yet good friends, who know
My heart, take counsel how to affront the blow.

[CLYTEMNESTRA *goes back into the Women's House; Attendants lead* ORESTES *and his followers through the main door.*

LEADER.

Ye handmaidens, arise, be bold:
See if our moving lips have power
To aid Orestes in his hour;
For sure ye loved this House of old.

CHORUS.

Thou holy Earth, thou holy shore
Beyond the grave, where rests his head
The Lord of Ships, the King, the Dead,
Now list, now aid, or never more!
The hour is full. The Guileful Word
Descends to wrestle for the right,
And Hermês guards the hour of night
For him that smiteth with the sword.

[*The* NURSE *enters from the Women's House, weeping.*

LEADER.

The stranger works some mischief, it would seem!
Yonder I see Orestes' Nurse, a-stream
With tears.—How now, Kilissa, whither bound,
And Grief the unbidden partner of thy round?

NURSE.

The mistress bids me call Aigisthos here
Quickly, to see these two, and learn more clear,
As man from man, the truth of what they tell.
Oh, to us slaves she makes it pitiable
And grievous, and keeps hid behind her eyes
The leaping laughter. Aye, 'tis a rich prize
For her, and for the House stark misery,
This news the travellers tell so trippingly.
And, Oh, Aigisthos, he, you may be sure,
Will laugh to hear it! . . . Ah, I am a poor
Old woman! Such a tangle as they were,
The troubles in this House, and hard to bear,
Long years back, and all aching in my breast!
But none that hurt like this! Through all the
rest . . .
Well, I was sore, but lived them down and smiled.
But little Orestes, my heart's care, the child
I took straight from his mother; and save me
He had no other nurse! And, Oh, but he
Could scream and order me to tramp the dark!
Aye, times enough, and trouble enough, and stark
Wasted at that! A small thing at the breast,
That has no sense, you tend it like a beast,
By guesswork. For he never speaks, not he,
A babe in swaddling clothes, if thirst maybe
Or hunger comes, or any natural need.
The little belly takes its way. Indeed,
'Twas oft a prophet he wanted, not a nurse;
And often enough my prophecies, of course,
Came late, and then 'twas clothes to wash and dry,
And fuller's work as much as nurse's. Aye,
I followed both trades, from the day when first

His father gave me Orestes to be nursed. . . .
And now he is dead; and strangers come and tell
The news to me. And this poor miserable
Old woman must go tell the plunderer
Who shames this house! Oh, glad he will be to hear!

LEADER.

How doth she bid him come? In what array?

NURSE.

I take thee not. . . . What is it ye would say?

LEADER.

Comes he with spears to guard him or alone?

NURSE.

She bids him bring the spearmen of the throne.

LEADER.

Speak not that bidding to our loathèd Lord!
"Alone, quick, fearing nothing" is the word.
So speak, and in thy heart let joy prevail!
The teller straighteneth many a crookèd tale.

NURSE.

What ails thee? Are these tidings to thy mind?

LEADER.

The wind is cold, but Zeus may change the wind.

NURSE.

How, when Orestes, our one hope, is dead?

LEADER.

Not yet! So much the dullest seer can read.

NURSE.

What mean'st thou? There is something ye have heard!

LEADER.

Go, tell thy tale. Obey thy mistress' word!
God, where He guardeth, guardeth faithfully.

NURSE.

I go.—May all be well, God helping me!

[*The* NURSE *goes out.*

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

— Lo, I pray God, this day:
Father of Olympus, hear!
Grant thy fortunes healingly
Fall for them who crave to see
In this House of lust and fear,
Purity, purity.
— I have sinned not, I have spoken
In the name of Law unbroken;
Zeus, as thou art just, we pray thee
Be his guard!

ALL.

There is One within the Gate
Of his foemen, where they wait;
Oh, prefer him, Zeus, before them

And exalt and make him great:
Two- and threefold shall he pay thee
Love's reward.

[*Antistrophe* 1

— Seest thou one lost, alone,
Child of him who loved thee well?
As a young steed he doth go,
Maddened, in the yoke of woe:
Oh, set measure on the swell,
Forth and fro, forth and fro,
Of the beating hoofs that bear him
Through this bitter course. Oh, spare him!
By his innocence we pray thee
Be his guard!

ALL.

There is One within the Gate
Of his foemen, where they wait;
Oh, prefer him, Zeus, before them
And exalt and make him great:
Two- and threefold shall he pay thee
Love's reward.

[*Strophe* 2

— Gods of the treasure-house within,
One-hearted, where the bronzen door
On darkness gloateth and on gold:
With present cleansing wash the old
Blight of this house: and aged Sin
Amid the gloom shall breed no more!

ALL.

And, O light of the Great Cavern, let it be
That this Man's house look up again, and see,

Till the dead veil of scorn
And long darkness shall be torn,
And the kind faces shine and old Argolis be free!

[*Antistrophe* 2

— And, Oh, let Hermês, Maia-born,
Be near, who moveth in his kind,
As the wind blows, to help at need:
The word he speaketh none may read:
Before his eyes the Day is torn
With darkness and the Night is blind.

ALL.

And, O Light of the Great Cavern, let it be
That this Man's house look up again, and see,
Till the dead veil of scorn
And long darkness shall be torn,
And the kind faces shine and old Argolis be free!

[*Strophe* 3

— Then, then the prison shall unclose:
A wind of Freedom stream above:
A flood which faileth not, a voice
Telling of women that rejoice,
One harp in many souls, one spell
Enchanted. Ho, the ship goes well!
For me, for me, this glory grows,
And Evil flies from those I love.

ALL.

Oh, in courage and in power,
When the deed comes and the hour,

As she crieth to thee "Son"
Let thy "Father" quell her breath!
But a stroke and it is done,
The unblamèd deed of death.

[*Antistrophe* 3

— The heart of Perseus, darkly strong,
Be lifted in thy breast to-day:
For them thou lovest in the grave,
For them on Earth, be blind, be brave:
Uphold the cloak before thine eyes
And see not while thy Gorgon dies;
But him who sowed the seed of wrong,
Go, look him in the face and slay!

ALL.

Oh, in courage and in power,
When the deed comes and the hour,
As she crieth to thee "Son,"
Let thy "Father" quell her breath!
But a stroke and it is done,
The unblamèd deed of death.

[*Enter from the country* AIGISTHOS.

AIGISTHOS.

A message called me; else I scarce had thought
To have come so quick. 'Tis a strange rumour, brought,
They tell me, by some Phocian wayfarers
In passing: strange, nor grateful to our ears.
Orestes dead! A galling load it were
And dripping blood for this poor House to bear,

Still scored and festerous with its ancient wound.
How shall I deem it? Living truth and sound?
Or tales of women, born to terrify,
That wildly leap, and up in mid-air die?
What know ye further? I would have this clear.

LEADER.

We heard the tale; but go within and hear
With thine own ears. A rumoured word hath weak
Force, when the man himself is there to speak.

AIGISTHOS

Hear him I will, and question him beside.
Was this man with Orestes when he died,
Or speaks he too from rumour? If he lies . . .
He cannot cheat a mind that is all eyes.

[*He enters the House.*

CHORUS.

Zeus, Zeus, how shall I speak, and how
Begin to pray thee and beseech?
How shall I ever mate with speech
This longing, and obtain my vow?

The edges of the blades that slay
Creep forth to battle: shall it be
Death, death for all eternity,
On Agamemnon's House this day;

Or sudden a new light of morn,
A beacon fire for freedom won,
The old sweet rule from sire to son,
And golden Argolis reborn?

Against two conquerors all alone,
His last death-grapple, deep in blood,
Orestes joineth. . . . O great God,
Give victory!

[*Death-cry of* AIGISTHOS *within.*

Ha! The deed is done!

LEADER.

How? What is wrought? Stand further from the door
Till all is over. Move apart before
Men mark, and deem us sharers in the strife.
For after this 'tis war, for death or life.

[*The Women stand back almost unseen. A Household* SLAVE *rushes out from the main Door. and beats at the door of the Women's House.*

SLAVE.

Ho!
Treason! Our master! Treason! Haste amain!
Treason within. Aigisthos lieth slain.
Unbar, unbar, with all the speed ye may
The women's gates! Oh, tear the bolts away! . . .
God, but it needs a man, a lusty one,
To help us, when all time for help is gone!
What ho!
I babble to deaf men, and labouring cry,
To ears sleep-charmèd, words that fail and die.
Where art thou, Clytemnestra? What dost thou? . . .
'Fore God, 'tis like to be her own neck now,
In time's revenge, that shivers to its fate.

[*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What wouldst thou? Why this clamour at our gate?

SLAVE.

The dead are risen, and he that liveth slain.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Woe's me! The riddle of thy speech is plain.
By treason we shall die, even as we slew. . . .
Ho, there, mine axe of battle! Let us try
Who conquereth and who falleth, he or I! . . .
To that meseemeth we are come, we two.

[*Enter from the House* ORESTES *with drawn sword.*

ORESTES.

'Tis thou I seek. With him my work is done.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*suddenly failing*).

Woe's me!
Aigisthos, my beloved, my gallant one!

ORESTES.

Thou lovest him! Go then and lay thine head
Beside him. Thou shalt not betray the dead.

[*Makes as if to stab her.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hold, O my son! My child, dost thou not fear
To strike this breast? Hast thou not slumbered here,
Thy gums draining the milk that I did give?

ORESTES (*lowering his sword*).

Pylades!
What can I? Dare I let my mother live?

PYLADES.

Where is God's voice from out the golden cloud
At Pytho? Where the plighted troth we vowed?
Count all the world thy foe, save God on high.

ORESTES.

I will obey. Thou counsellest righteously.—
Follow! Upon his breast thou shalt expire
Whom, living, thou didst hold above my sire.
Go, lie in his dead arms! . . . This was the thing
Thou lovedst, loathing thine anointed King.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I nursed thee. I would fain grow old with thee.

ORESTES.

Shall one who slew my father house with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Child, if I sinned, Fate had her part therein.

ORESTES.

Then Fate is here, with the reward of sin.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou reck'st not of a Mother's Curse, my child?

ORESTES.

Not hers who cast me out into the wild.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Cast out? I sent thee to a war-friend's Hall.

ORESTES.

A free man's heir, ye sold me like a thrall.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If thou wast sold, where is the price I got?

ORESTES.

The price! . . . For very shame! speak it not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak. But tell, too, thy father's harlotries.

ORESTES.

Judge not the toiler, thou who sitt'st at ease!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A woman starves with no man near, my son.

ORESTES.

Her man's toil wins her bread when he is gone.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

To kill thy mother, Child: is that thy will?

ORESTES.

I kill thee not: thyself it is doth kill.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A mother hath her Watchers: think and quail!

ORESTES.

How shall I 'scape my Father's if I fail?

CLYTEMNESTRA (*to herself*).

Living, I cry for mercy to a tomb!

ORESTES.

Yea, from the grave my father speaks thy doom.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah God! The serpent that I bare and fed!

ORESTES.

Surely of truth prophetic is the dread
That walketh among dreams. Most sinfully
Thou slewest: now hath Sin her will of thee.

[*He drives* CLYTEMNESTRA *before him into the Palace. The* CHORUS *come forward again.*

LEADER.

For these twain also in their fall I weep.
Yet, seeing Orestes now through mire so deep
Hath climbed the crest, I can but pray this eye
Of the Great House be not made blind and die.

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

Judgment came in the end
To Troy and the Trojans' lord,
(O Vengeance, heavy to fall!)
There came upon Atreus' Hall

Lion and lion friend,
A sword came and a sword.
A walker in Pytho's way
On the neck of her kings hath trod,
A beggar and outcast, yea,
But led by God.

[*Antistrophe* 1

Came He of the laughing lure,
The guile and the secret blow,
(O Vengeance, subtle to slay !)
But there held his hand that day
The Daughter of Zeus, the pure,
Justice yclept below.
Justice they called her name,
For where is a goodlier ?
And her breath is a sword of flame
On the foes of her.

ALL.

Cry, Ho for the perils fled,
For the end of the long dismay !
Cry, Ho for peace and bread ;
For the Castle's lifted head,
For the two defilers dead,
And the winding of Fortune's way !

Even as Apollo gave [*Strophe* 2
His charge on the Mountain, He
Who holdeth the Earth-heart Cave,
Hast thou wrought innocently
Great evil, hindered long,
Tracking thy mother's sin . . .
Is the power of God hemmed in

So strangely to work with wrong?
Howbeit, let praise be given
To that which is throned in Heaven:
The Gods are strong.

[*Antistrophe* 2

And soon shall the Perfect Hour
O'er the castle's threshold stone
Pass with his foot of power,
When out to the dark is thrown
The sin thereof and the stain
By waters that purify.
Now, now with a laughing eye
God's fortune lieth plain;
And a cry on the wind is loud:
"The stranger that held us bowed
Is fallen again!"

ALL.

O light of the dawn to be!
The curb is broken in twain,
And the mouth of the House set free.
Up, O thou House, and see!
Too long on the face of thee
The dust hath lain!

[*The doors are thrown open, and* ORESTES *discovered standing over the dead bodies of* AIGISTHOS *and* CLYTEMNESTRA. *The Household is grouped about him and Attendants hold the great red robe in which Agamemnon was murdered.*

ORESTES (*He speaks with ever-increasing excitement*).

Behold your linkèd conquerors ! Behold
My Father's foes, the spoilers of the fold !
Oh, lordly were these twain, when thronèd high,
And lovely now, as he who sees them lie
Can read, two lovers faithful to their troth !
They vowed to slay my father, or that both
As one should die, and both the vows were true !
And mark, all ye who hear this tale of rue,
This robe, this trap that did my father greet,
Irons of the hand and shackling of the feet !
Outstretch it north and south : cast wide for me
This man-entangler, that our Sire may see—
Not mine, but He who watcheth all deeds done,
Yea, all my mother's wickedness, the Sun—
And bear me witness, when they seek some day
To judge me, that in justice I did slay
This woman : for of him I take no heed.
He hath the adulterer's doom, by law decreed.
But she who planned this treason 'gainst her own
Husband, whose child had lived beneath her zone—
Oh, child of love, now changed to hate and blood !—
What is she ? Asp or lamprey of the mud,
That, fangless, rotteth with her touch, so dire
That heart's corruption and that lust like fire ?
Woman ? Not woman, though I speak right fair.

[*His eyes are caught by the great red robe.*

A dead man's winding-sheet ? A hunter's snare ?
A trap, a toil, a tangling of the feet. . . .
I think a thief would get him this, a cheat

That robs the stranger. He would snare them so,
And kill them, kill them, and his heart would glow. . . .
Not in my flesh, not in my house, O God,
May this thing live! Ere that, Oh, lift thy rod
And smiting blast me, dead without a child!

[*He stops exhausted.*

CHORUS.

O deeds of anger and of pain!
O woman miserably slain!
Alas! Alas!
And he who lives shall grieve again.

ORESTES.

Did she the deed or no? This robe defiled
Doth bear me witness, where its web is gored,
How deep the dye was of Aigisthos' sword;
And blood hath joined with the old years, to spoil
The many tinctures of the broidered coil.
Oh, now I weep, now praise him where he died,
And calling on this web that pierced his side. . . .
Pain, pain is all my doing, all my fate,
My race, and my begetting: and I hate
This victory that sears me like a brand. . . .

CHORUS.

No mortal thro' this life shall go
For ever portionless of woe.
Alas! Alas!
It comes to all, or swift or slow.

ORESTES.

Yet wait: for I would have you understand.
The end I know not. But methinks I steer

Unseeing, like some broken charioteer,
By curbless visions borne. And at my heart
A thing of terror knocketh, that will start
Sudden a-song, and she must dance to hear.
But while I am still not mad, I here declare
To all who love me, and confess, that I
Have slain my mother, not unrighteously;
Who with my father's blood hath stained the sod
Of Argos and drawn down the wrath of God.
And the chief spell that wrought me to the deed
Is Loxias, Lord of Pytho, who decreed
His high commandment: if this thing I dare,
He lays on me no sin: if I forbear . . .
I cannot speak his judgment: none can know
The deeps thereof, no arrow from the bow
Out-top it. Therefore here ye see me, how
I go prepared, with wreaths and olive bough,
To kneel in supplication on the floor
Of Loxias, touch the fire that evermore
Men call the undying, and the midmost stone
Of Earth, flying this blood which is mine own.
And how these evil things were wrought, I pray
All men of Argos on an after day
Remember, and bear witness faithfully
When Menelaüs comes. . . . And take from me,
Living or dead, a wanderer and outcast
For ever, this one word, my last, my last. . . .

LEADER.

Nay, all is well. Leave no ill omen here,
Nor bind upon thy lips the yoke of fear.
All Argos thou hast freed, and with one sweep
Two serpents' heads hurled reeking to the deep.

ORESTES (*overcome with sudden terror*).

Ah! Ah!
Ye bondmaids! They are here: like Gorgons, gowned
In darkness; all bewreathed and interwound
With serpents! . . . I shall never rest again.

LEADER.

What fantasies, most father-loved of men,
Haunt thee? Be strong, thou conqueror! Have no fear!

ORESTES.

These are no fantasies. They are here; they are here,
The Hounds of my dead Mother, hot to kill.

LEADER.

The blood upon thine hand is reeking still:
For that the turmoil in thy heart is loud

ORESTES.

O Lord Apollo! More and more they crowd
Close, and their eyes drip blood, most horrible!

LEADER.

One cleansing hast thou. Loxias can quell
Thy tempest with his touch, and set thee free.

ORESTES.

You cannot see them. I alone can see.
I am hunted. . . . I shall never rest again.

[*Exit* ORESTES.

CHORUS.

— Farewell. May blessing guide thee among men.
— May God with love watch over thee, and heed
Thy goings and be near thee at thy need.

ALL.

Behold a third great storm made wild
By winds of wrath within the race,
Hath shook this castle from its place.
The ravin of the murdered child
First broke Thyestes in his pride:
Second, a warrior and a King,
Chief of Achaia's warfaring,
Was smitten in the bath and died.
And Third, this Saviour or this last
Doom from the deep. What end shall fall,
Or peace, or death outsweeping all,
When night comes and the Wrath is past?

[*Exeunt.*

# NOTES

THE beginning of this play is lost, through an injury to the single MS on which it depends. The MS only begins at "Ha, what sight is this?" which is conventionally numbered l. 10, though probably there were at least twenty or thirty lines preceding it. Curiously enough, three passages from the missing part are quoted by different ancient authors, so that a good deal of it can be supplied.

P. 15, l. 2, The meaning of this phrase was obscure even to Aeschylus' contemporaries, and is discussed in Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1126 ff. It seems to mean that Hermês Psychopompos (Guide of the Dead) is son of Zeus Chthonios (Zeus of the Underworld). "Saviour" and "Help in War" are other titles of Hermês.

P. 16, l. 6, Înachos: The river of Argos. So Achilles on reaching manhood cut off his long hair as a gift to the River Spercheios. Rivers in a land subject to drought were worshipped as "life-giving" or "rearers of young men" (*κουροτρόφοι*).

P. 17, l. 22, CHORUS: The Chorus are slave women taken in war. We know no more of them. They certainly do not seem to be Trojans, and, like the Nurse later, they have the feelings of loyal old retainers towards the House, hating Aigisthos and

loving the memory of Agamemnon. Throughout the play Aigisthos is represented as a usurper and a tyrant, holding his rule by fear. Cf. (ll. 885 ff., 935 ff.) the exultant tone of the two last choruses.

P. 17, l. 32, "Dread, very dread": Clytemnestra had a dangerous dream. If she had gone at once to a skilled interpreter, he might possibly have given it a favourable interpretation and thus partly averted the consequences. Instead of this she shrieked in terror. That shriek was itself an interpretation which could never be explained away. The prophets, when consulted, explained that the dream came from the anger of Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra then made the fatal mistake of sending offerings to his grave to appease his wrath. This was far too slight a thing to appease him; but it did awake him, and so enabled him to help his avengers.

P. 18, l. 61, "Who knows the great Wheel's swing," etc.: A difficult passage. It seems to mean that justice (i.e. both retribution to the sinner and reparation to the sinned-against) sometimes comes quick and clear; sometimes is long delayed, and sometimes is wrapt in night, i.e. no one can say for certain whether it comes at all.

P. 19, l. 84, Electra feels that it is a mockery, and perhaps an impiety, to pour the peace-offerings of the murderess. The Leader urges her not to hesitate, but deliberately to use the offerings as an appeal for vengeance. The thought at first appals her, but she nerves herself to it. In her prayer she deliberately tells her father the things that will most sting him into wakefulness. The passage "I lay these tokens down," seems to mean that she puts upon the grave

stones or some other objects to act as a perpetual reminder and keep her prayer alive.

P. 22, l. 151, CHORUS : "Let fall the tear," etc. : The grave is a barrier-stone between the dead and the living, a "turner-back of Evil as of Good"; yet not absolutely so. The prayers of his children, and the tears of their suffering, may after all get past the barriers and reach the "darkened heart" of the dead. This idea is in the essence of the play.

P. 23, ll. 165–210, Recognition scene. It was a traditional story that Electra had recognized Orestes by a lock of hair, a footprint, and a bit of weaving. Aristophanes (*Clouds*, 534 ff.) speaks of his comedy, "like Electra of old, recognizing its brother's tress" when it meets a spectator of true Attic taste. It would be a mistake to apply realist canons to this ancient tale. Among barefooted peoples family likenesses are apt to be chiefly traced in the feet and hair. Both Arab and Australian "trackers" are cited to this effect, as also is the Odyssey (iv. 148 ff., xix. 358, 381). See Tucker's *Choëphoroe*, p. lxvi. It is interesting to note that Sophocles in his *Electra* omits the traditional signs altogether. Euripides uses them, but uses them in a completely original way to illustrate Electra's state of mind. An old peasant tries to show the "signs" to her. She longs to believe that Orestes has come, but in fear of disappointment refuses to look at them and rejects every suggestion of comfort. See my version and note there. (P. 31 ff., ll. 508–548.)

P. 25, l. 211, "Torment of heart and blinding of the brain" : Electra bows down and buries her face in her hands. When she next looks up, there is an armed man like her father standing just above her

father's tomb. Note that she begins by refusing to believe. A motive which is afterwards deepened and elaborated by Euripides has been suggested by Aeschylus. See above.

P. 29, ll. 269 ff., "Oh, Loxias shall not mock," etc. : Orestes at the end of the play goes mad ; before that certain of his speeches are strangely violent and incoherent. Scholars have generally supposed the text to be exceptionally corrupt, but I think it will be found that this particular tone of incoherence never comes except when there is a mention of Delphi and Apollo's command. I think, therefore, that the wildness of these speeches is intentional, and the madness of the end does not come unprepared. It will be noticed in the last scene with what psychological daring as well as subtlety Aeschylus depicts the final collapse of his hero's reason.

P. 29, l. 275, "The wild bull's way" : Ought Orestes to accept a money payment to atone for his father's slaying, or, like a wild bull driven out from the herd, should he accept no peace but insist on a life for a life ? The commutation of the blood-feud for a money payment was, of course, a softening of primitive manners. As such, it is elaborately provided for in various codes of early law. Yet, while it marks a social advance, at the same time it often involves a softening and weakening of the sense of duty in the individual. Orestes could probably have lived in comfort if he had been willing to accept a large blood-price from Aigisthos and say no more about it. He prefers, with all its misery and danger, the absolute fulfilment of his duty to his father. To us, and in this special case to Aeschylus, the rule of

vengeance seems savage. We speak glibly of the "duty of forgiveness." But it should be remembered that we expect the police to arrest the offender and the judge to see that he is hanged. In Orestes' days men had to do justice on the wicked with their own hands, or else leave them unpunished and triumphant.

P. 29, l. 290, "That bronze horror": The meaning is not known. It may be some instrument of torture, but more likely it is something intended to make a noise, like the bell sometimes worn by lepers in the Middle Ages, to warn people of the presence of the Accursed One.

P. 30, ll. 315–510, The Invocation. This extraordinary scene is really the heart of the play and gives to the *Choëphoroe* a strange supernatural atmosphere which is absent from both the *Electra* plays. There is no invocation scene in Sophocles; there is a brief one in Euripides (*Electra* 671–685). It has great emotional effect but is only about 15 lines long and does not attempt to produce the cumulative impression of this scene, in which we feel human suffering and love gradually breaking through the barriers of death and earth and darkness. At the end the dead Agamemnon is awake, and Orestes hardly needs to think about the details of his dangerous plot. A power more than mortal is behind him. It will be noticed how the scene works up, like certain religious litanies, to a pitch of more and more overpowering and almost hysterical emotion: then, in the regular Greek manner, it descends again to something like calm.

P. 33, l. 380, "Ah me, that word, that word": The thought that he himself hates his mother is

what pierces Orestes' heart. In his next speech also he is bewildered. Not till l. 434, "All, all dishonour," does he lose all scruple in the storm of his passion.

P. 35, ll. 428–442, "Ho, Mother; ho, thou, Mother, mine enemy!" First Electra tells of the shameful secret burial: this rouses Orestes to fury. Then the Leader tells of something worse. The murderess had mutilated the body; cut off the dead man's feet so that he could not pursue, and his hands so that he could not lay hold of her. This would make Agamemnon helpless, and so leave Orestes without hope. The unexpected abomination breaks Orestes down.—This device of terrified murderers is a piece of primitive magic. It is attributed to Clytemnestra by Sophocles (*Electra* 445), and to the witch Medea by Apollonius Rhodius.

P. 38, l. 471, "The House hath healing," i.e. the House itself can cure bloodshed by bloodshed, sin by vengeance.

P. 40, l. 510, "Behold, ye have made a long and yearning praise": The dead must surely now be satisfied. Even if neglected for years he has now had such a lamentation as requites him for all.

P. 40, l. 515, "What power the Daemon hath which guardeth thee": The word Daemon has no connotation of evil in classical Greek.

P. 41, l. 517, "One dead and feeling not!": Not strictly consistent perhaps with the invocation scene, but psychologically right. The dead are past feeling . . . unless something very extraordinary is done to make them feel. Then, who knows?

P. 41, l. 527, Clytemnestra's dream that she gave birth to a serpent is traditional. It is found both

before Aeschylus and after. The asps of Libya and divers other serpent things were "matricides"; at birth they tore and killed their mother. See *Herodotus* 3, 109; Euripides' *Orestes* 479.

P. 43, l. 563, "An accent of Parnassian speech": It is interesting to note that there is no trace of Phocian dialect in Orestes' actual language later on. To make him talk broad Phocian would, according to convention, have made him "comic," like certain Boeotians, Spartans, and Scythians in Aristophanes. On the other hand, an oriental colour is often allowed in tragic language, especially in lyric passages, e.g. in Aeschylus' *Persae*.

P. 43, l. 574, The reading is doubtful. I read *μ' οἱ* for *μοι* and *καλεῖν* for *βαλεῖν*.

P. 44, l. 583, "One Below": i.e. Agamemnon.

P. 44, l. 585, CHORUS: The sense of this chorus is often difficult and the text apparently corrupt, especially the end. "There are many terrible things, but none so terrible as a woman's passion; for instance (602), Althaea, daughter of Thestios, who slew her son Meleâger; or (612) Skylla of Megara who betrayed her father Nîsos; or (631) the Lemnian women, who slew their husbands; and, after all (623—a stanza has been transposed) have we not an example here in Clytemnestra?"

Althaea: See Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*. When her son Meleâger was born she saw in the room the three Fates, one of whom foretold that Meleâger should die when a red brand then burning in the fire was consumed. Althaea leapt out of bed and saved the brand. Afterwards, when Meleâger fell in love with Atalanta, and in a feud on her behalf

killed his mother's two brethren, she threw the brand into the fire.

Skylla : Skylla, daughter of Nīsos, King of Megara, whose life depended on a magic lock of hair. She fell in love with Minos, who was besieging Megara, and betrayed her father to him. The rings of Cretan gold were apparently a love-gift.

Lemnos : The native women of Lemnos in one night rose and killed their Greek husbands, perhaps because the men had left them for Thracian concubines, perhaps for other reasons. See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, Ed. 2, p. 77.

P. 47, l. 652, The time is now evening and the scene is in front of the castle of the Atreidae. In Aeschylus' time there was probably no actual change made in the stage arrangements. The back wall represented a palace front, while in the centre of the orchestra was an altar or mound which stood for Agamemnon's tomb. In the first half of the play you attended to the tomb and ignored the back scene : in the second you attended to the castle and ignored the mound.

Observe the delay before the door is opened. This increases the dramatic tension and at the same time makes us feel that the House is "beset with evil." An ordinary great house would be thrown open at the first knock.

P. 48, l. 668, The first entrance of Clytemnestra, about whom we have thought and talked so much, is immensely important. She comes unexpected, standing suddenly in the great doorway where we last saw her, with blood on her brow and an axe in her hands, standing over the dead bodies (*Agamem-*

*non* 1372). Before that we had seen her in the same position, hardly less sinister, calling Cassandra to her death: "Thou, likewise, come within." (*Agamemnon* 1035.)

The first entrances of Clytemnestra in the two *Electra* plays are also striking. In Sophocles (*Electra* 516) she bursts in upon Electra, like a termagant, in a sudden agony of rage. In Euripides (*Electra* 998 ff.), when we have been led to expect a savage murderess, we meet "a sad, middle-aged woman whose first words are an apology, controlling quickly her old fires, anxious to be as little hated as possible."

P. 48, l. 674. There is an almost reckless fluency about Orestes' speech. In his bitterness he treats the news of his death as a trifle, not showing, nor expecting from others, any particular emotion about it. As a matter of fact, it gives Clytemnestra a greater shock than he expected. There is no reason to doubt the general sincerity of her words. Of course, she feared Orestes and knew he was her enemy. When it comes to a fight she is ready. At the same time, she has, as shown in the last scenes of the *Agamemnon*, an aching sense of disaster and friendlessness, and would like to think that, when all the rest of the House had gone under, the son she had sent away was living somewhere unhurt, and might perhaps be grateful to her. As it is, her old enemy, the Curse of the House, has beaten her.

P. 51, ll. 731–782. This poignant and vivid scene of the old nurse, ludicrous in her tears, is a striking departure from the stately conventions of Greek tragedy. Neither Sophocles nor Euripides has left any scene like it. Herakles in the *Alcestis* is

pro-Satyric. The panic-stricken Phrygian slave in the *Orestes* (*Orestes* 1369–1530) is grotesque, but grotesquely horrible. In actual language the nurse's diction is on the whole tragic in colour and her metre correct : the grammar is rather loose and exclamatory. The name "Kilissa" (Cilician woman) suggests a slave.

P. 53, ll. 783–837. Again the sense is difficult and the text extremely uncertain. The chorus pray in the name of their innocence and Agamemnon's long service to Zeus for pity ; to the Gods of the Possessions of the House (Latin "penates," sometimes grouped together as Zeus Ktêsios) to help in the cleansing and rebuilding of the House (l. 800) ; to Apollo of the Cavern of Delphi, the God of Light, to help the House to light out of darkness (l. 812) ; to Hermês, the God of craft and secrecy, to help in a plot for the right (l. 819). The battle will be a battle of liberation from tyrants.

P. 56, l. 827. Orestes should think of his duty to his father and forget all else. As Perseus when killing the Gorgon turned his eyes away lest her face should freeze him to stone, so let Orestes, when he meets his mother, veil his eyes and smite.

P. 56, l. 838, AIGISTHOS : Just as they mention "him who sowed the seed of wrong," he enters. In a short but vivid scene we may perhaps see the man's harshness and confidence, but the truth is that in Aeschylus we are told almost nothing about Aigisthos except that Clytemnestra loved him.

P. 57, ll. 855–874. The usual rather low-toned, prayerlike song broken in upon by the death-cry. (Cf. *Agamemnon* 1342, Euripides' *Electra* 1163, etc.)

The Chorus naturally shrink away from the house in order not to be involved in imminent danger. This also has the advantage that it leaves the scene empty, and the slave who rushes out in terror crying for help finds no one. I receive the impression that the scene is meant to be dark, which would imply that at the end of the play Orestes stood between men holding torches. There is wonderful power in this scene. There are no men to help ; no women even ; all the world is dumb and asleep. Then suddenly there is Clytemnestra.

P. 59, l. 886, "The dead are risen" : A deliberately riddling line, in the Greek meaning either : "I tell thee the dead are slaying the living man," or "I tell thee the living man is slaying the dead."

P. 59, l. 893, "Aigisthos, my beloved" : Up to this moment she has been ready to fight. The death of her beloved unstrings her. One would like to know whether Aeschylus meant her actually to have the axe and drop it, or whether Orestes is intended to come too soon. Note with what intensity even when the fight has gone out of her she fences for her life. Every line of the scene is charged with meaning and feeling. The thing that breaks her is the sudden realization (928) that this is the serpent of her dream. An interesting piece of technique which I have not tried to represent is here found in the original. Orestes' words in 927 are so arranged as to produce almost exactly the word "hisses" (*σοὐρίζει* for *σοι ὁρίζει* = *συρίζει*).

P. 61, ll. 920, "A woman starves" : This is her first argument in *Agamemnon* 862 ff. : "That any woman thus should sit alone," etc.

P. 62, ll. 935–972 CHORUS : A short song of exultation. Justice has come both to Troy and to Argos. Hermês, the God of Guile, has done it, but Justice held his hand and he only did her will. We have had several times already the scruples of Orestes' conscience, but this is the first doubt expressed by the Chorus as to the righteousness of the mother-murder. "Is the power of God hemmed in so strangely to work with wrong?" All doubts, however, are swallowed up in joy at the liberation of Argos and the downfall of the tyrants.

P. 65, l. 973–end. This marvellous scene scarcely needs comment. The showing of the robe in which Agamemnon was slain is, perhaps, imitated in the Forum Scene of *Julius Caesar*, which came to Shakespeare direct from Plutarch's *Lives* (*Brutus* ch. 20, *Anthony* ch. 14). But the main interest here is in something quite different. The madness of which we have seen the approaching shadow now closes in upon Orestes. The first definite sign of it comes at l. 996, where, as Conington followed by Dr. Verrall pointed out, he tries to find a name to describe his mother. As he gropes for the word, the great crimson robe with the stains of blood obsesses his mind and he calls her "a winding-sheet, a snare, a net," and so on. (So Cassandra in *Agamemnon* 114 calls her "a net and a snare.") We may notice that "dead without a child" (1006) is a more awful curse in Greek than in English. He appears at this point to sink into speechlessness, only to rouse himself more fiercely at l. 1010 : "Did she the deed or no?" The few low-toned lines of music by the Chorus add a great beauty to the scene.

P. 67, l. 1043. Orestes' last sentence is unfinished ; as he was evidently going to leave behind him some word of bad omen, the Leader of the Chorus interrupts with words of comfort. As she mentions the "two serpents' heads" (1048) there is a cry of horror, and the "armed slayer" is seen appealing to the slave women to protect him. He has seen the shapes with snaky hair beginning to crowd upon him. The last touch of tragedy is in 1061 when he realizes that he is alone in his suffering ("You cannot see them ; I alone can see") and knows that he "shall never rest again."

P. 69, ll. 1065–1076. The last chorus states with a clarity unusual in Aeschylus and more characteristic of Euripides, the exact problem of the Trilogy. First came the sin of Atreus against the children of Thyestes —though that too was an act of revenge ; second, the punishment of that by Thyestes' son Aigisthos when he and Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon ; thirdly, the punishment of that second crime at Apollo's bidding by Orestes. Is Orestes the Third Saviour, or is his act only another link in the interminable chain of crime ? If the Curse is now brought to sleep, is that because the House is really purified or because there is nothing left for the Curse to work upon ? For the "Third Saviour," see my *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 46 ff. "First comes this year with its pride and its pollution, then the winter that kills it, then the clean spring. First comes the crime, then the punishment, which is only another crime, then perhaps the redemption." Whether Orestes is a saviour or a final caster-down of the race is determined in the next play, the *Eumenides*.

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